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3-15-2004

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Lawrence University

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### Recommended Citation

Lawrence University, "Two Lawrence University Seniors Awarded \$22,000 Fellowships for Year-Long Study Abroad Projects" (2004).  
*Press Releases*. Paper 295.

<http://lux.lawrence.edu/pressreleases/295>

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## Two Lawrence University Seniors Awarded \$22,000 Fellowships for Year-Long Study Abroad Projects

*Posted on: March 15th, 2004 by Rick Peterson*

With the help of kitchen cupboards and china cabinets, Janie Ondracek and Rachel Hoerman cultivated intellectual curiosities as youngsters that have since blossomed into adult passions. Those passions will soon be fed — both literally and figuratively — with a yearlong study abroad adventure as newly anointed Watson Fellows.

Ondracek, a senior neuroscience major from Neenah, and Rachel Hoerman, a senior majoring in history and studio art from Bryant, were two of this year's 50 recipients of a \$22,000 fellowship announced Monday (3/15) by the Providence, R.I. based Thomas J. Watson Foundation. The fellowship supports a "wanderjahr" — a year of independent travel and exploration outside the United States — on a topic of the student's choosing.

Ondracek grew up watching her parents create mouth-watering magic in the family kitchen through wholly different methods. While her mother, the owner of a catering business, paid close attention to her collection of cookbooks, Ondracek's Czech Republic-born father whipped up eastern European favorites with the flair of a culinary conductor, improvising freely from his spice rack with a pinch here and a dash there.

"Learning through observation, I couldn't help but love to cook," said Ondracek.

Her fondness for food, including its preparation, will soon take Ondracek to France, India and Japan to examine the pedagogical methods chefs use to instruct culinary arts students, the technical and visual preparation of meals and the habits, customs and

etiquette found in the social consumption of a meal.

“These countries represent three very distinct customs of food preparation, from the seasonings and ingredients used, to the manner in which each course is prepared,” said Ondracek. “I want to explore these countries as an apprentice cook and as a true devotee of the rigor, care and pleasure that goes into making, arranging and consuming a meal.”

During her year abroad, Ondracek will visit a variety of restaurants and culinary schools in Lyon and Paris in France, interview chefs and individual residents in both southern India, where the Hindu influence favors a largely vegetarian cuisine, and northern India, where the kitchens of Bengali women play a role and conclude her wanderjahr in Japan speaking with culinary instructors in Tokyo and Kyoto.

“Social situations fascinate me,” said Ondracek, who plans to pursue a medical degree when she finishes her fellowship. “Each country undoubtedly has a very specific code of etiquette. I’m curious to learn how these rules developed and the history behind them.

“I hope to experience not only the pleasures of savoring foreign delicacies, but the satisfaction of learning about fascinating cultures in such a revealing and personally significant way,” she added. “The Watson offers me a chance to meet people who are as enthusiastic about food as I am despite our cultural differences. And it offers me an opportunity, unlike any other, to be able to say that I have honestly and unreservedly pursued one of my most treasured interests in life.”

Hoerman’s fascination with non-Western art grew out of the living room of her grandmother’s 100-year old farmhouse. Stories told by her grandfathers and great uncles recounted their experiences in

World War II and the Korean War. Objects from those faraway lands kept in the family china cabinet — beautifully decorated black lacquer shelves, photographs of Japanese temples and ink-brushed bamboo — sparked a strong sense of wonder. A well-traveled aunt's collection of oriental scrolls, silk screens and carvings further fueled Hoerman's young imagination and artistic drive.

Beginning in August, Hoerman will embark on a comparative study of printmaking in Japan and painting and printmaking in Bhutan, Tibet and Australia. Her project will focus on the artistic traditions that have survived to the present day and how geographic isolation, cultural factors and various modern institutions have altered or aided the development of traditional art and artists.

“As a student of history and art, I'm constantly reminded of the long and often strange transitions both ideas and images make as they move through the years,” said Hoerman, who, as a freshman, was named a Wriston Scholar, allowing her to travel extensively throughout Europe the past three summers. “By the same token, I'm struck by how many things seem to remain the same. Painting in Bhutan and Australia and printmaking in Japan are art forms that have been preserved and practiced for centuries.

“I want to find answers to questions about how traditional arts have survived and how they are passed down and preserved, who creates traditional art and what role art and artists play in society,” Hoerman added.

Hoerman will start her project in the tiny east Asian country of Bhutan, the world's only Buddhist kingdom, where she will visit the National Painting School in the capital of Thimphu, as well as temples and monasteries throughout the country.

The second phase of her project will take her to Kyoto, Japan to study woodblock printing, which dates to the 7th century. In addition to working at the Kyoto Handicraft Center, which specializes in the preservation of traditional Japanese handicrafts, Hoerman will visit galleries, museums and temples in Tokyo.

The final four months will be spent in Australia, where she hopes to work with artists in Aboriginal communities, observing their work and learning their traditional designs and processes.

“My fellowship ties together the interests that have sustained me from childhood through college,” said Hoerman, who hopes to pursue graduate studies in creative writing and museum studies or possibly painting. “This project will challenge my skills as an artist and as an observer in cultural environments very different from my own and to reassess my world view. It’s going to allow me to pursue what I love to do and to test my determination and ability to do it on a global scale.”

Ondracek and Hoerman were selected from nearly 1,000 students representing 50 of the nation’s top liberal arts colleges and universities who applied for the fellowship. Since the program’s inception in 1969, Lawrence has had 60 students awarded a Watson Fellowship.

The Watson Fellowship Program was established by the children of Thomas J. Watson Sr., the founder of IBM Corporation, and his wife, Jeannette, to honor their parents’ long-standing interest in education and world affairs. Watson Fellows are selected on the basis of the nominee’s character, academic record, leadership potential, willingness to delve into another culture and the personal significance of the project proposal.